Crimes Against History

The Definitive Faction Timeline

What follows is a chronology of Faction Paradox, at least as far as chronology can be applied. Further details (on most of the subjects covered here) can be found in The Book of the War, while the events of The Faction Paradox Protocols - the present - aren't dealt with in this timeline.

The dates given are relative to the present as it's perceived by Faction Paradox, and certainly don't relate to the early twenty-first century.

Ancient History

The Universe, Etcetera

c. 10,000,000 years ago

The first conscious life in the universe develops. The culture in question can reasonably be described as humanoid, and immediately begins to imprint its own principles on the universe around it, if not actually causing the proliferation of hominid forms throughout the rest of history then certainly making it easier for hominid species to survive. As the first self-aware tenants of the continuum, this primal culture can't strictly be considered alien, or even a species, as such: these are the ones who set the template for the rest of sentient life, and therefore can only be considered a force of nature, or at the very least a force of history. Creating a technology, they perfect stellar manipulation, and the resultant energy source gives them (theoretically) complete control over the temporal sciences. From this point on the Homeworld exists in an unusual relationship with the rest of history, and its occupants increasingly view themselves as the neutral arbiters of causality, observing - and on occasion policing - the "lesser" species which evolve in their wake. The price they pay for this power is sterility. Natural childbirth and natural death both become passe on the Homeworld, almost as if mortality's beneath them, and the culture divides itself into Houses: aristocratic bloodlines which maintain the balance of power and (occasionally) produce new members through biological engineering. Removed from the traditional sex-and-death cycle, the Houses become static, and progress becomes almost as rare as procreation. The Homeworld initially answers to the authority of a clique of ruling Houses, the five leading Houses being overseen by a Presidency… and more than anything else, it's the purpose of the Presidency to maintain the status quo. The

Spiral Politic - those parts of history which can be overseen from the Homeworld, which is to say, the whole of history - is of purely theoretical interest to the academicians of the Homeworld.

The Great Houses will remain in control of causality throughout the aeons to come, despite occasional run-ins with the emerging lesser species, most of which remain ignorant of their existence. At the heart of the Houses' power are their timeships, structures so complex that even their own engineers have only an arbitrary understanding of the processes involved, and which can only be constructed by the careful manipulation of the timeline (each timeship essentially collaborates in its own creation, the more complicated systems being beyond the knowledge of the Houses themselves). Over the years it's established that although the timeships are in some way intelligent, it's not an intelligence which in any way resembles the intelligence of a living thing. The ships certainly aren't self-willed even though psychological bonds with their pilots become common. During the experimental phase of this grand new technology, the Houses inadvertently punch several large holes in the continuum, and as a result the Spiral Politic is briefly assaulted by an influx of biological forms which clearly don't belong there. These things are so inimical to life in the mundane universe that the Houses can only regard them as monsters, referred to in the Homeworld's own overblown tongue as Yssgaroth: more a hostile form of anti-structure than a species, many of the Yssgaroth's victims become grotesque, corrupted things in the intruders' own image, often at odds with the rest of linear time. After a monumental struggle, the holes are sealed and the Yssgaroth are largely vanquished from normal-space. One (previously minor) House distinguishes itself in battle to such a degree that it takes on the role of "security adviser" to the ruling Houses, and although the original protocols of the Homeworld refer to an inner circle of five ruling Houses it soon becomes traditional for a sixth to attach itself to the Presidency. It's the last major change to House political structure for some considerable time.

In the years to come, the Great Houses will take the Yssgaroth incident as clinching proof that too much progress can be a bad thing. In a society as static as theirs, it must be a very reassuring thought.

Living Memory

Births, Deaths and Revolutions

1,202 years ago

One of the more notable (if unpolitical) Houses produces a new clutch of offspring, as per schedule. But for reasons which remain vague, probably involving impurities in the birthing system, the newborns are less than perfect. At least one of them bears the first sign of the insanity which will plague the House in years to come, while another is destined to become the greatest dissident the House, and possibly the Homeworld, has ever produced. Furthermore, as history will shortly reveal, this House isn't alone. House Dvora - one of the Houses closest to the Presidency - also notes irregularities in its breeding-engines, but as an elite bloodline its internal affairs are shrouded in polite secrecy.

Until now, almost nothing has changed in ten-million years… so the trouble with the birthing process must seem like a particularly bad omen, at least for those who actually notice it. In fact, it's quite possible that the flaw in the House's bloodline is never corrected simply because it's considered unthinkable that serious errors might occur. The Houses have been ignoring the problems of the outside universe for aeons, believing themselves both secure and superior, so they've had a lot of practice when it comes to overlooking things.

920 years ago

Details of this period are sketchy, and as a result there's very little background to what happens next. However, a rough outline of events

might run as follows:

The period which later becomes known as the Imperator Era begins, as one of the newer-blooded members of House Dvora ascends to lead the Presidency. What's perhaps most surprising is that he manages to gain so much ground in the politics of the Homeworld despite an obvious lack of decorum: indeed, he could even be described as ambitious, in a world where ambition is theoretically unknown (again, it may well be the ruling Houses' unfamiliarity with ambition which blinds them to it). The new Presidential head takes an unusual interest in the rest of the Spiral Politic, though at the time of his ascendancy none of the other Houses see any reason to be concerned by this.

Yet behind closed doors, the new nominal head of the Homeworld has already formed the Order of the Weal, the Homeworld's first (and only) true counter-intelligence service. He seems to be expecting some form of trouble from the universe outside the Homeworld, and also perceives a threat from the quiet megalomania of the Houses on the Homeworld itself. In this he's either prescient or paranoid. Most of the ruling elite, of course, don't even notice that anything's changed.

So when the new Presidency suddenly revolts against the protocols of the Homeworld, and claims that the ruling Houses can only fulfil their potential by involving themselves in the affairs of the Spiral Politic, most of the ruling Houses are taken entirely by surprise. The Homeworld remains unaware of the politics behind all this: the Order of the Weal has identified its own founder as the real threat to the Homeworld's security, and exposed the head of the Presidency, forcing him to show his hand and begin what can only be described as a crusade against the outside universe. This new militaristic policy is utterly inconceivable to the rest of the Homeworld. The former leader of House society rapidly builds an army (largely picked from the ranks of the lesser species), leaves the protection of the Great Houses, and begins cutting a swathe of blood and burning history across the Spiral Politic… his goal apparently being to build himself an empire which spans the continuum and bends causality to his own will. He is, in a word, mad.

To say that this is remarkable would be an immense understatement. Nobody is capable of explaining how such an aberration could occur, although there's suspicion (never proved) that some form of outside infiltration might have been responsible. Those who've noticed the recent

glitches in the Houses' reproductive systems begin to take a different view. The suggestion is made, though never put before the elite, that the Homeworld is suffering a kind of retro-shock: if the speculation is true, then something very bad indeed is due to happen to the world in the future - perhaps only centuries in the future - and the Houses, being time-sensitive, are feeling the effects in advance. This might explain the madness of the Imperator Presidency, which does after all have access to the psychopredictive methods used by the ruling Houses to monitor the outside universe. Certainly, the pronouncements of this Imperator do seem to suggest that he's building an army to fight an enemy which only he can see.

(Predictive technology is never used to divine the future of the Homeworld itself, and according to the ten-million-year-old protocols it's theoretically impossible for an agent of the Houses to meet anybody from the Houses' own future… whether this is a law of nature or a rule laid down by the forefathers is difficult to establish, but as the forefathers defined much of known science it's possible that both are true.)

916 years ago

The Imperator's forces lay waste to over a dozen worlds in the outside universe before the ruling Houses can stop him. Technically the technology exists to find and recall him in an instant, but the rebellion has caused such a shock to the status quo that it takes the Houses some time just to decide on a course of action: they have no understanding of the term rapid response, and no idea how to deal with a crisis originating in their own ranks. This becomes obvious when the Imperator is finally returned to the Homeworld, and the Great Houses set a new precedent by having him executed, an act which inadvertently reminds the entire culture of its mortal, fleshy roots. For a hierarchy which thinks of itself as "eternal" and can only survive in stasis, this is not a good move. A new head of the Presidency is hurriedly installed before anybody can start to question the Houses' competence.

The Imperator Presidency is the first serious disturbance to the Homeworld in nearly ten-million years, but it's only the start. In the wake

of the affair, the ruling Houses re-open one of their ancient prison facilities - a minor world in an envelope outside normal-time - to deal with any such uprisings in future… but in years to come the mandate of this prison is to be widened, and it'll be used to incarcerate members of any species judged by the Houses to have committed offences against history. Or even those who simply threaten the Houses' position.

More importantly, the Imperator Presidency has destroyed the wall of polite secrecy which has traditionally separated the Houses from the lesser species. In the past the Homeworld has watched the rest of the Spiral Politic from a distance, unnoticed and unapproachable, but in the wake of the Imperator's crusade many cultures in the outside universe have become shockingly aware of the Houses' existence. And naturally, many of these cultures feel more than a little threatened now they know they're under scrutiny. Though none of the lesser species even come close to matching the technological expertise of the Houses, several societies begin to take up arms, just in case they ever get a chance to take on these distant gods of the Homeworld.

c. 750 years ago

Society on the Homeworld remains more or less stable at this point, although there are increasing numbers of renegades and runaways, suggesting that cracks are appearing in the hierarchy. Several timeships have simply vanished from the world, not to mention various (almost fetishistic) relics of the pre-time-travel era. For the first time, the ruling Houses openly acknowledge that some intervention in history may be necessary, and the fact that the archons have been imprisoning selected individuals from the outside universe becomes public knowledge.

On the Homeworld this leads to the formation of a social movement which believes in the direct manipulation of outside affairs, something which is (officially) anathema to the ruling elite, who insist that imprisonments are only carried out when absolutely necessary. In truth there's been an interventionist faction on the Homeworld since time immemorial, largely fuelled by the bloodlines which organised the

Yssgaroth war, but only now does the idea spread to the rest of the populace. When the ruling Houses act to prevent one of the lesser species gaining time-technology of their own, the interventionists seem entirely vindicated. Previously the Homeworld has only intervened when another species threatens history, but now the Council seems prepared to stop anybody even getting the chance to try.

Apart from the Imperator Presidency, this is the first time anybody can remember seeing what might be called a protest movement on the Homeworld. Thinkers continue to suggest that something is causing these disturbances to society, disturbances which will only increase as the Houses approach their “judgement day”.

454 years ago

The covert interventionists have by this point attained so much power, including the infiltration of the Presidency, that they can begin a far more direct intervention in historical affairs than has ever been thought possible. The ruling Houses are repeatedly forced to approve of interventionist action, just in order to prevent a major political schism. Fear of another Imperator Presidency has been guiding their actions for over three-hundred years now, and its elderly members have finally reached the point where they’re prepared to consider the genocide of lesser species rather than face a civil war.

Naturally, this sort of attitude is in complete breach of the official protocols. Civil unrest grows, as members of even the lowliest Houses realise that the political landscape has changed. The Order of the Weal struggles to hold back the intervention movement, believing it to be the greatest current threat to House society, but the organisation’s far too small to fight the interventionists on all fronts. After aeons of self-imposed stasis, this is merely the prelude to the cultural revolution ahead.

453 years ago

There’s a scandal on the Homeworld when a member of one of the Houses - one of the first broken offspring of the faulty breeding programme, from a bloodline which was once one of the five leading Houses but has since become infamous for its somewhat eccentric membership - finally questions the protocols in public, and begins speaking out in favour of a more dynamic, adaptable model of history. The underlying idea seems to be that change for its own sake is a worthwhile goal. The suggestions made are beyond even the worst excesses of the interventionists, almost as if this “protestor” is deliberately goading the more reactionary elements among the ruling Houses. Yet rather than wanting to resist/ control the outside universe, this new renegade seems to want to embrace certain principles of the lesser species, possibly even learning a thing or two from the organic reproduction of the other cultures.

For the most part the Great Houses find this utterly appalling, and the rebel finally breaks away to found a brand new House, the first new bloodline founded since the early days of time-active civilisation. The name chosen for this new line is House Paradox, an obvious slap-in-the-face as conventional thinking states that paradox is the worst possible thing a time-active culture can create. As the founder of the House, the rebel takes on the traditional title “Grandfather”, and the ruling Houses are horrified to learn that there’s actually nothing in the protocols to stop this sort of thing.

However, when House Paradox (such as it is) begins openly experimenting with non-linear time systems the Presidency has an excuse to crack down. The defining moment comes when the Grandfather is ordered to appear before an Audience of the ruling Houses, and arrives before the seat of the Presidency dressed in a tailored, polished skeleton, worn as if it were ceremonial armour. The bones of the suit are the bones of a creature half-hominid, half-bestial… the bones of the Houses’ own kind, but as they would look if the war against the Yssgaroth had been lost instead of won. Even the Grandfather’s attire is in breach of the protocols, fashioned from materials which simply shouldn’t exist in this timeline, in itself a message (and an implied threat?) to the leading Houses.

Presented with this act of defiance - and used to aeons of subservience - the ruling Houses are unsure how to react, and prove themselves to be impotent in the face of the crisis. With the authorities in disarray the

Grandfather simply walks free. As the old Presidency faces calls for a new leadership, House Paradox prepares to gain followers.

452 years ago

The unrest reaches a head when the leader of the Presidency is assassinated after only four-hundred years of service. It later transpires that the assassin is merely a deranged renegade, apparently unconnected to any interventionist faction… but the fact that the idea of a deranged renegade is no longer shocking is significant in itself. The assassin is believed dead, though nobody can say for certain whether it was suicide or a covert execution.

The long process of electing a new Presidency begins. The process is always a slow one, lasting months at best and years at worst, but this time the archons are quite specifically in no hurry. The Homeworld is considered to be facing the greatest cultural crisis in its long history, and nobody wants the responsibility of backing a new leader. With society already shaken, a wrong decision could prove calamitous. As history is about to show.

447 years ago

A new head of the Presidency is elected, the Great Houses choosing a candidate whom they hope will be able to reach a compromise between the reactionary Houses and the new dissenters, a candidate known for his personal interest in the kind of unusual time-theory which is currently in so much dispute (it’s a general rule that the nominal head of House society has to have an instinct for the temporal sciences, for fairly obvious reasons). But the new head - the 406th individual to hold the title - proves to be less than stable, sparking fears of another Imperator. His researches into the early history of the universe lead him to conclude that the cosmos is being threatened by formless horrors from the dawn of time, and this unfortunately leads him to become perilously close to the Paradox apologists. The ruling Houses spend a great deal of time spreading stories

about how sane and wise the new head is, but the elite are hardly as credible as they used to be. It's now generally acknowledged that the problems with the Houses' reproductive systems are affecting every strata of society. Well, of course.

446 years ago

Eleven days of localised history are removed from the timeline of eighteenth century Earth by House Paradox, and stored in a small bubble outside the normal mass of the Spiral Politic. This tiny Eleven-Day universe is kept by the Grandfather as a form of safehouse, and it's suspected that the entire manoeuvre is orchestrated with the covert knowledge of the (corrupted) head of the Presidency. Given his own "awkward" interests and researches, he must surely have noticed it.

Over the following years the Eleven-Day Empire will remain largely unoccupied, with any of the House's followers found there being in transit, using the time-bubble as a forward base for their own researches in the outside universe.

444 years ago

The 406th head of the Presidency commits suicide only three years into his term of office (a record, in a society where Presidencies can potentially last for millennia), believing that there's no escape from the formless horrors which will one day return to haunt the universe. He spends his last days spreading peculiar stories and insulting the rest of the Houses.

In truth, his attempts to probe the further reaches of history have led him to experience premonitions of the Homeworld's fate. In his more lucid (final) moments, he comes to realise that the Great Houses are soon to be plunged into a war so utterly catastrophic that it'll make the conflict with the Yssgaroth look like a border skirmish… a war in which the enemy remains unseen and unknown, despite his ramblings.

In his wake, the scientific researches of the 406th Presidency are declared arcane and promptly outlawed. But they've already had an impact on the Homeworld's psyche. Rumours of impending catastrophe are once again spreading throughout the Houses, and there are suggestions that the "centralised" policy of the Homeworld might need to be changed… why, a few of the Houses argue, should we be a sitting target by concentrating ourselves on a single world? Why remain here, if we won't be secure forever?

It later transpires that the late head of House society also had these thoughts, and covertly made plans for the creation of a whole series of new colony-worlds, breaking the tradition of the Homeworld being a unique vantage-point over the rest of time. Nobody among the ruling Houses, however, is currently prepared to act on such plans.

443 years ago

Ever since the Imperator Presidency, the threat of hostile action from the lesser species has been a constant, lurking fear in the psyche of the Homeworld. However, despite the fact that many minor powers are still busy arming themselves for any (potential) future conflict, rationally speaking the Houses are convinced that there's no immediate threat to themselves or their powerbase.

It's something of a body-blow, then, when a hostile force actually manages to set foot on the Homeworld. That any species could access the separate time-frame of the Homeworld is remarkable enough, but what's alarming is that the Houses' own military guard - in existence since the founding of the Houses, but until now used almost exclusively for ceremonial purposes - proves to be laughably ill-equipped to deal with enemy forces in face-to-face combat. Fortunately for the Houses, the invaders have very little in their favour apart from their ability to punch their way into the Homeworld's territories, and the hostile units are eventually dispatched by time-active weaponry.

It's yet another affront to the Homeworld's dignity. Worse still, during the crisis several elder members of the Houses flee the comforts of civilised

society and briefly seek sanctuary outside the Homeworld's capital, in the non-technological wilderness which polite society usually fails to even acknowledge. The cultural impact of this, as some of the leading lights of the Great Houses are forced to get back to nature, will be immense.

The Grandfather of House Paradox is, as ever, on hand to crow over the wreckage.

442 years ago

The result of these sundry crises - incompetent Presidencies, rampant interventionists and off-world invaders - is the schism feared for so long by the ruling Houses, a situation only worsened by the House Paradox controversy. Luckily, the result is a civil dispute rather than a full-scale conflict. A rival Presidency breaks away from the Homeworld and establishes itself in normal-time, on the medium-technology world of Dronid, where it attempts to use members of the lesser species as a kind of menial class. This flawed attempt at a New Homeworld soon falters, mostly because the rebels don't really have the first idea how the outside universe works, but nonetheless fragments of the Houses' time-technology will litter Dronid for years to come. And for the first time since the Imperator, the Great Houses have become directly involved in the politics of the outside universe.

As the ruling Houses pull themselves back together, the decision is finally made to crack down on the errant Grandfather, the authorities claiming that the Dronid incident has shown the need for more rigid controls on time-theory. The head of House Paradox is tried and imprisoned for life on the prison-world, in perpetual suspension. And as the prison-world exists outside of normal time it's anticipated that the Houses will hear no more about the matter…

c. 430 years ago

Always prescient when it comes to the politics of the outside universe, the Order of the Weal has been conducting certain investigations of its own, and has reached the conclusion that the predictions of the 406th Presidency might not have been insane as society likes to think. It thus becomes the first group on the Homeworld to acknowledge that a future War in Heaven is inevitable, and to begin making plans for the oncoming apocalypse.

Yet this new obsession has left the Order neglecting affairs on the Homeworld. The truth is that history is passing its agents by. Ultimately the Order disintegrates, a victim of House politics, unable to compete with more modern groups like the interventions and the followers of House Paradox. As it's still technically a secret counter-intelligence service, the Homeworld fails to notice its passing, and its conclusions about the War are either lost or ignored.

It'll be some years yet before the Houses will have to confront what the Order has already deduced.

Modern Time

The Paradox Era

203 years ago

Over the previous century or so the influx of new ideas on the Homeworld has led to the creation of a variety of new technologies, many of them cross-breedings of House technology and (most startling, for the old guard) alien notions as to how technology should work. Several of the Houses experiment with machine intelligences, essentially "robots", devices considered utterly vulgar until now. Although these machines fall out of favour very very quickly, the concept of "servitor machines" refuses to go away, and some even suggest that timeships - which can be given any physical shape, the exterior being a mere gateway to the internal dimensional mass - should be given hominid, sentient forms. As timeships are already intelligent in non-humanoid ways, however, the idea hardly seems practical.

The Houses have never been noted for their imagination. Up until this point, every generation of timeship has been identified by number, the most recent ships generally being designated 88-Forms. But the technological revolution results in several Houses attempting to graft new systems into the timeships' internal architectures, resulting in endless mutations and a numbering system which makes increasingly little sense. The ruling Houses

can just about tolerate ships with designations like 106-Form, 128b-Form, 161.55-Form, n+x-Form and pi-R-760-Form, but when the system gets so out of control that some of the latest vessels are designated 1056771z-Form the authorities decide to act. All timeships of the latest generation are re-designated 89-Form, regardless of any cross-bred elements they might carry.

It's a sign that the archons are prepared to step in to stop the new science getting out of hand. From this point on, a much closer check will be kept on the development of the timeships.

201 years ago

A new head of the Presidency is elected to lead House society. Something of a surprise choice, she promises a more open style of government and a more humanitarian approach, though it's generally thought that humanitarian is just a synonym for "interventionist". It's thought that her election is due to her field experience in the outside universe, the ruling Houses feeling that in the wake of new threats from the Spiral Politic it might be wise to have someone in charge who's used to dealing with the lesser species. The election is incredibly close, and the interventionist lobby is suspected of pulling strings, but as a personality this 411th head is on the whole popular. (Nonetheless, over the decades her approach will become far more ruthless and desperate than her inauguration speech might suggest.)

Perhaps the most telling thing, however, is the rate at which the Homeworld's getting through its leaders. Whereas in the old days a Presidency could hold office for well over a thousand years - or far longer, in the early days of the civilisation - in the present era the heads of House society have a tendency to survive for mere decades. And that, of course, just fuels the rumours of an imminent catastrophe.

The new Presidency hardly gets off to an auspicious start. Mere months after the inauguration, the Great Houses become aware of a temporal crisis on eighteenth century Earth, during which certain forces are released which could potentially threaten the smooth-running of causality: but of course, this is nothing unusual. Problems like this occur all the time, as small, awkward lumps of history pop up in the timelines of the lesser worlds, and as usual an agent of one of the Houses is on hand to deal with the situation.

But this time things are slightly different. Although the forces in question are contained, the incident briefly sends out shockwaves which stretch as far as the Homeworld. During the crisis the head of the Presidency suffers a nervous spasm, a brief period of insanity which causes her to suffer appalling visions not unlike those of the 406th head… and then spontaneously release several hundred inmates of the prison-world.

Over two centuries after being incarcerated, Grandfather Paradox is once again free, and this time knows there's no point even returning to the Homeworld. In an act of truly legendary self-mutilation, the Grandfather slices off one arm with a rusty knife, to remove the criminal tattoo imprinted there - a biological link to the Homeworld - and thus sever the last connection to the other Houses. It's at this point that the Grandfather begins to form a stable organisation, or cult, now naming it Faction Paradox rather than House Paradox as a demonstration of its political ambitions in the outside universe. The ruling Houses broadly state that no member of Faction Paradox should ever set foot on the Homeworld, although as the death penalty isn't an option and exile is considered to be in bad taste it's not clear what they intend to do with anyone who breaks this ruling.

Once this has been achieved, the Grandfather simply vanishes. It's said that the founder of Faction Paradox wilfully erases all personal traces from the continuum, leaving no record of ever having existed on the Homeworld, leaving no remnants in the physical universe at all other than a carefully-selected group of followers and their relics.

(It's notable that the crisis on Earth which causes all this occurs in the late eighteenth century, at the same time that the early voodoo-cults are developing there. There does, at least aesthetically, seem to be a connection between early voodoo methodology and the ritual of Faction Paradox: in the same way that the voodoo-cults deliberately embrace the death and corruption endemic in the West Indies during the late 1700s, Faction Paradox takes a quite definite pride in confronting the Great Houses with the notion of their own mortality. The very word paradox has the same effect on a member of the Houses that the sight of a skull-and-crossbones might have on the mind of an eighteenth century human being, but whether the Faction informs the voodoun, or the voodoun inform the Faction, is a matter of debate. Also, it's unclear whether there's a direct link between the

brief crisis on Earth and the Faction's "lifting" of the Eleven-Day Empire from 1752.)

200 years ago

The original birth-House of Grandfather Paradox collapses, following the long-term insanity of its members. As the term House refers to both a bloodline and a physical location, the word "collapses" is well-chosen in this context.

Society hardly notices, the old House having long since fallen into disrepute and obscurity. Only a few members of the bloodline survive, although the House has one last legacy to leave the Homeworld: the civilisation witnesses its first natural childbirth in ten-million years when an alien biological unit, brought to the Homeworld by the House against all usual protocol, mates with one of the Homeworld's servitor-classes. For the ruling elite this is the latest in a long line of unpleasant surprises, but many begin to question whether introducing alien biomass to the birthing-process is such a bad idea. These few years see more change in the structure of House society than most of the previous millennia.

(The survivors of the collapsed bloodline plan to build themselves a new House, though records are vague as to what happens next. It's generally believed that the survivors die out in the difficult years which follow… but their disappearance from history occurs at exactly the same time as the rise of Faction Paradox, the Grandfather's own new line. The two may or may not be connected. It merely needs to be pointed out that traditionally, the Faction does have a habit of recruiting members from among the homeless and dispossessed.)

188 years ago

The Great Houses finally begin to realise that something appalling is about to happen to the Spiral Politic. Though details are at first unclear, House agents in the field report encounters with other House agents from the future - itself a sign that the usual rules of causality are no longer in effect - a future in which the Homeworld is engaged in a desperate war with an enemy who has the ruling Houses outgunned on all fronts. The visions of the mad, suicidal 406th head are turning out to be true… at least in part. The name and nature of the enemy, however, remain unclear. The Houses begin to wonder whether one of the lesser species might be preparing to usurp the Oldest Civilisation, while a few consider the possibility of a new

breed of Yssgaroth. On the other hand, many still find the notion of a new war inconceivable and refuse to take the information seriously.

The head of the Presidency instructs her people to put most of their resources into identifying this future menace, and new research is carried out into timeship technology, in the hope that better weapons can be grown into the ships' systems. This concept of "cross-fertilisation" reflects the debate over the natural childbirth issue, and much to the distaste of the old guard research begins into the possibility of returning to a more dynamic sex/death system. Membership of Faction Paradox grows accordingly.

c. 175 years ago

Faction Paradox begins to build up its influence in history, deliberately setting out to alarm and intimidate the Great Houses, recruiting members from the lesser species and scandalising the Homeworld further by granting these recruits equal status with its followers from the Houses (even giving them the archaic title for junior members of a House, Cousin). The Faction makes its first attempts to corrupt and recruit certain notable agents of the ruling Houses, and begins experimenting with biological weaponry, almost mocking the research ordered by the Presidency. The Faction also begins building a homeworld for itself, a monstrous black parody of the original Homeworld, and as ever there's more than a little gallows-humour in the Faction's actions… at least at first. Its members seem to feel that their primary purpose is to goad the ruling Houses, and the protocols which the ruling Houses are supposed to uphold.

On the Homeworld, the increasing War anxiety is the perfect breeding-ground for the Faction's own brand of paranoia even though the Faction's agents are technically forbidden to set foot there. For many of Faction Paradox's new recruits, the thinking is that when the Homeworld and its unseen enemy wipe each other out then the Faction can emerge triumphant: though whether this was the Grandfather's plan is another matter. Thus the Faction, again mimicking the ruling Houses, slowly becomes a far more aggressive force.

Meanwhile, the notion of natural childbirth becomes increasingly acceptable on the Homeworld itself. The first generation of natural births arrives, the head of the Presidency tactfully failing to mention that these increased numbers are largely necessary because of the coming War. Words like "mother" and "father", long-since considered obsolete, return to

popular usage. And as the only House already employing these terms is Faction Paradox, the Faction seems somehow justified in its beliefs.

146 years ago

On the Homeworld, certain other moves have been made in anticipation of the new War in Heaven. Eight colony worlds have been crypto-formed into cloneworlds of the Homeworld, as decoys as well as bolt-holes, the notion presumably being that each of the Nine Homeworlds can be transported to a different location in order to distract the enemy. Nobody points out that the mad 406th head of the Presidency planned exactly the same thing. In addition, various once-outlawed weapons are assembled and readied on the current head's orders.

What's notable about the cloneworlds is that according to the final orders of the current Presidency, they're entirely off-limits to the rest of the Homeworld, the agents who maintain them being given strict instructions never to have any contact with the ruling Houses. The official reason for this is that the cloneworlds have been laced with the history and culture of House society, and that they're to be kept sterile in case back-up copies of the information are required: but this leads many to question whether the inhabitants of the other eight Homeworlds know their worlds are forgeries, or whether they all believe themselves to be living on the original.

The head of the Presidency retires from service at this point, her final fate unknown. It's suggested in some quarters that she may have become the head of the Presidency on one of the other Homeworlds, presumably to complete the illusion that her world is the original. Other rumours suggest that even she might not realise she's been moved to a fake. Without her the Homeworld is thrown into some confusion, as various political factions debate the future of civilised society. Though some wish to follow the old Presidency's preparations for the War, many Houses still hold that the War is an impossibility, and refuse to take any further precautions- at least until there's some evidence as to what this supposed enemy might be. Perhaps surprisingly, the interventionists are among those who argue against the possibility of warfare. Unopposed for the last few centuries, their view is that any potential enemy can easily be neutralised before it becomes a real threat.

For now, it's the nay-sayers who win out. The new head of the Presidency is nondescript and obstructionist, and demonstrates a complete

inability to reign in the rising paranoia of the Houses.

126 years ago

One of the original renegades from the broken generation of the Houses (born c. 1,076 years previously) unexpectedly returns to the Homeworld, having spent much of the intervening time consorting with the lesser species across the Spiral Politic. His return is particularly surprising given the number of crimes for which he's wanted. However, he claims to bring with him the first solid evidence of the future enemy, an enemy which - as he explains to a closed session of the ruling Houses - even the interventionists don't have a hope of neutralising.

Most of the House elite are convinced. The Presidency itself isn't, and from this point on becomes more obstructionist than ever, almost as if it's terrified of facing the facts. To accept the evidence as true would, after all, be an acknowledgement that the entire Presidency is built on a faulty premise. The Homeworld is not eternal.

c. 100 years ago

One of the many worlds on which Faction Paradox attempts to spread its influence is Dronid, ancient home of the (failed) rival Presidency. Dronid is a perfect site for the Faction: its culture is already littered with time-active relics of the Great Houses, and the natives have become partly dependent on the salvaged technology. Safeguards left behind by the Houses ensure that the locals are unable to abuse this technology to too great a degree, but working covertly the Faction manages to build itself a powerbase on the world, not so much a cult as an underground criminal organisation. (Dronid is a magnet for unsavoury technology-hungry species, and as a result the planet's political landscape revolves around off-world criminal groups. Dronid is one of the most unashamedly corrupt worlds in the whole of the sentient continuum.)

Eighty-six years ago

In a desperate, last-ditch effort to prove that the future War is a myth and that no enemy can possibly exist, the head of the Presidency himself leaves the security of the Homeworld as part of an expedition designed to colonise the stretch of the Spiral Politic which (according to the returning renegade's information, at least) forms the enemy's current home. But if the

act is designed to re-enforce the status quo, then it’s flawed from the very beginning. The Nine Homeworlds aside, House society has never, ever done anything as vulgar as setting up off-world colonies.

Nor is the project a success. The expedition never returns. The remains of the Homeworld’s leader are returned to the ruling Houses in a condition which has still never been satisfactorily explained, and House society receives its first, conscious, deliberate message from the enemy.

It becomes painfully clear that War is a probability, if not an inevitability. The hardline interventionists suddenly fall silent, abandoning their obstructionist stance and making their own, covert, preparations. The ruling Houses themselves, robbed of yet another Presidency, turn to the only individual they can for guidance: the renegade who first brought them proof of the enemy’s existence, the only individual on the Homeworld who has first-hand experience of what the future might hold, despite his former criminal tendencies.

So begins the final Pre-War Presidency, with the renegade acting as adviser to an increasingly panicked House elite.

c. Seventy years ago

The interventionists know full well what the prospect of War means. They understand that in a cross-dimensional conflict, a defeat for the Homeworld won’t just mean their own demise but their complete eradication from history. For a culture which is a form of history, the thought is appalling. The interventionists, who still regard themselves as the elite of the elite, decide to take extreme action. They intentionally remove themselves from the timeline, but under controlled circumstances, possibly employing the same techniques which the Grandfather of House Paradox used in order to retire from history. Cut off from the main body of causality, these elitist interventionists become the Celestis, their intention being to observe the War from outside the Spiral Politic.

From this point on they begin to see themselves as the new gods, as intangible, ineffable powers for whom history is a mere spectacle. Now purely conceptual in form, their only true intervention in the Spiral Politic is the acquisition of followers from among the lesser species: like all gods, without followers they have no mass and no meaning. To the rest of the universe, however, they’re just impotent ghosts who play little real part in the War to come.

(Naturally, the date of the interventionists' departure is approximate by its very nature. All record of their removal from causality was, of course, excised along with the interventionists themselves. All that's known is all that can be surmised.)

Sixty-nine years ago

The Presidency finally sanctions research into the feasibility of an organic/timeship hybrid, or at least, a timeship capable of sentient thought in the hominid sense of the word sentient. It's now known, thanks to what little data can be gleaned from the Homeworld's future, that such a ship is possible… although the technologies involved in timeship construction are far too subtle for an artificially intelligence to be simply bolted on to a standard model. The most recently-created timeships are still 89-Forms, but as this new project is intended to see the creation of a truly new generation the ruling Houses decide that the experimental model will be known as a 101-Form.

The 101-Form is not a success. The details of the experiment are quickly concealed by the ruling Houses, but it's rumoured that the construction is such a monstrosity that it barely qualifies as a timeship at all, and that it's utterly beyond the control of its creators. As the ship's existence is officially denied, its ultimate fate remains unknown. Logic dictates that it should have been destroyed, although some claims maintain that the 101-Form was too difficult to kill and instead imprisoned at a secret location, while others hold that it simply escaped into the outside universe.

Whatever the truth, the Houses are clearly a long way from being able to engineer a sentient timeship from scratch. With the War now visible on the temporal horizon, the Presidency has to ask itself whether the new time-technology can really be perfected before the cataclysm. In the meantime, ordinary timeships are equipped for warfare, and another rubicon is crossed when the Presidency gives orders to specially engineer and mass-produce timeships for the purposes of battle. Thus the 90-Form military vessels come into service. Even in the prehistoric war with the Yssgaroth, timeships were never used in combat, at least not in open conflict. The Houses' agents, too, are adopting a policy of whatever's necessary, is right. Many of those answerable to the Presidency, sent out on research missions to the outside universe, are not just pragmatic but positively amoral.

Sixty-two years ago

By this point Faction Paradox is itself becoming corrupt, turning into a purely political organisation dedicated to the acquisition of power, mainly through criminal means. Many in the group, particularly the younger members, are far more brutal and far less philosophical than the Grandfather's original followers. Or perhaps it's just a trick of the absence-of-memory.

On Dronid, the Faction Paradox contingent is typical of the corrupted order. The Faction's powerbase is nothing more than a local criminal network, led by a series of overseers who often have only a minimal understanding of Faction lore. It's at this point that a new criminal syndicate arrives on Dronid from off-world, and although the heads of this organisation remain unseen its ground agents are members of the lesser species with no known access to time-technology. On Dronid the syndicate refers to itself as the Incorporate, the ruling body. With the Faction sinking fast, the Incorporate's followers rapidly develop their own local powerbase, and in a daring move execute the Faction's leader on the world. The result is a decade-long gang war.

Meanwhile, on its own makeshift homeworld, Faction Paradox's penchant for biological/ technological weaponry is starting to pay off. Biodata viruses are engineered which can, if properly applied, infect a victim and re-write his or her biology retroactively, turning the subject into a Faction agent from birth. It's unquestionably impressive, but some of the Faction's upper ranks - including Father Morlock, most talented of the young generation of biological armourers - begin to dwell on the possibility of introducing such a virus to an entire ecosystem…

Sixty years ago

The Faction is by now involved in drug deals, slave deals, and sundry sordid underworld arrangements across the Spiral Politic. They also begin peddling time-technology to the lesser species, with little regard for the consequences. Such is the Faction's reputation that the Mothers and Fathers are starting to think of themselves as untouchable.

They aren't. The Great Houses, thinking of the War and fast becoming paranoid, crack down and wipe out the Faction's homeworld. There are survivors, but the Faction's back is broken. Those members who escape settle themselves in the Eleven-Day Empire, which finally becomes a fully-fledged community rather than just a clearing-house. From this hidden base

of operations they once again begin to send out feelers, setting up cabals around history and slowly infiltrating other societies, but this time it's a matter of survival rather than greed. With few resources available, contact with the other remaining Faction outposts - e.g. Dronid - suffers. The new wave of Faction Paradox has been taught a lesson.

This time, when the Faction begins infiltrating other worlds it's careful to ensure that the Great Houses aren't alerted. It learns to plant itself in the cultures of other species, rather than flooding worlds with its own agents and technology. More and more emphasis is put on ceremony instead of weaponry. This policy has an effect on the Homeworld, too, as over the next few years a number of officially-outlawed cults spring up among the younger members of the Houses. Many of these cults believe themselves to be doing the will of the Grandfather, although most of their members are just bored newbloods picking up on the War anxiety.

Nonetheless, the skull becomes an increasingly common symbol amidst the spires of the Homeworld's capital. (By now even the elder members of the Houses have been fooled into thinking that the rites of the Faction are ancient rites, and that the Grandfather's knowledge dates back to the dawn of time. In truth it's the method of the Faction to be adaptable, and to wear whatever clothing suits its purposes… the organisation has invented most of its heritage from scratch.)

Fifty-six years ago

The end of the last Pre-War Presidency, and the end of the last true Presidency to date. The former-renegade-cum-adviser, who's done so much to prepare the Homeworld over the past few decades, now becomes the official head of House society: however, he refuses to take on the Presidency's official titles or vestments of office, claiming that the imminent War Era will require a different kind of leadership. He takes on the title of War King, a title which - with its military overtones, and its suggestion of an inherited monarchy on a world which still distrusts the notion of family - would have been unthinkable just a century or so earlier.

It's the War King who paves the way for a genuine House Military, gradually replacing the old, inadequate ceremonial guard, though there's some doubt that the new wave of soldiery will be ready in time for the conflict. And despite his more pro-active outlook, the War King maintains

the tradition of refusing to allow the Houses contact with the rest of the Nine Homeworlds.

Fifty-five years ago

Of course, there have always been other time-aware societies in the Spiral Politic: many of the lesser species have acquired a limited form of temporal engineering, although the Great Houses have always been quite certain that such technology will have no significant impact on the structure of causality. Now, however, things are beginning to change. The War King introduces the possibility of making alliances with other time-active cultures. Although the Houses should technically have access to any point in these cultures' histories, by entering into a pact the Houses might theoretically tie their own "present" to the "present" of one of the lesser species.

The suggestion comes about simply because it's already beginning to happen, without the Homeworld's permission. In some parts of the causal map, the histories of certain posthuman sects (which is to say, the bloodlines, cross-breeds and sub-species descended from vulgar humanity) are starting to intersect with the history of the Great Houses. It's unclear whether this is an inevitable side-effect of a universe entering War-time, or whether the enemy is already making alliances of its own, tying the posthumans to the War in order to turn them into troops against the Houses.

Whatever the truth, several posthuman groups are beginning to scavenge time-technology from the higher powers, a reason for concern in itself. Agreements, if not formal treaties, become the order of the day. And at the same time, the Homeworld begins to realise that there are some areas of the Spiral Politic which it simply can't monitor, almost as if the history there isn't "their" kind of history any more.

Fifty-two years ago

Once again, agents of the Great Houses find themselves caught up in their own futures. As the War King continues to make preparations across the span of the Spiral Politic, a rare combination of factors sees one of the Houses' agents come into contact with the next generation of time-technology by sheer accident. Perhaps as a response to the coming War, one unusually aware timeship - an old, obsolete, but nonetheless unusually well-travelled model - has decided to cross-breed with a human subject of its

own volition. The inevitable result of this, according to the ruling Houses' information, will be the first hominid-sentient timeship: the very thing the ruling Houses have been trying to engineer since the 101 experiment. The Homeworld watches the progress of this cross-breeding with interest.

(What the Houses don't at first realise is that the timeship in question has used a combination of technologies to perform this cross-breeding operation. Some of the methods involved actually have their roots in the procedures of Faction Paradox, while other elements have been taken from the future, from an era after the beginning of the War. The cross-breeding is therefore something of a paradox in itself.)

Back on Dronid the forces of the Faction have fallen into disarray, with the Incorporate gaining complete dominance and the Eleven-Day Empire unable to assist. A series of half-insane Faction leaders doesn't help, but what nobody yet suspects is that a greater story is playing itself out here. The Incorporate is in fact an intelligence-gathering arm, a feeler, for the enemy the Great Houses are to face in their War. (It's possible that the Incorporate may even be the first physical manifestation of the enemy, although acting under a false identity and concealing itself behind followers from the lesser species. It might explain the choice of name.)

As the Homeworld begins to understand this, an agent of the Houses is planted on Dronid, and local politics is manipulated so that he becomes the Faction's local leader. The ruling Houses are using Faction Paradox, albeit a particularly weakened part of Faction Paradox, to achieve their own ends. It's a sure sign of the Faction's waning influence. But most importantly, for the next year the War is to be fought on Dronid in microcosm, a model of the cosmic gang-war to come.

Current Affairs

The War

Fifty-one years ago

The cross-breeding programme results in the creation of the first organic/ timeship hybrid, which the ruling Houses designate a 102-Form. The ship, on the other hand, likes to call herself Compassion.

Certain elements among the Houses attempt to return this timeship to the Homeworld for study, and for force-breeding with other timeships, but the ship is unwilling to allow this. Compassion and her pilot briefly go on the run from their own world's forces. The War King, always more willing

than most to negotiate with non-House agencies, ultimately brokers a deal with the 102-Form: but before any breeding programme can begin, events on Dronid reach crisis point.

So far, Dronid has witnessed a kind of deadlock. The agents of the still-unnamed enemy have been vying for power with the agents of the Homeworld, one side using selected members of the lesser species, the other using the surviving members of Faction Paradox. Neither side has pushed the point, and neither side has risked a full-on confrontation. But now the enemy - perhaps having sounded out the opposition - makes its move, and in one brutal operation takes the entire world, threatening to turn it into a bridgehead for an assault on the rest of the Spiral Politic. Forces directed by the War King immediately move in to stop the enemy before it expands its influence any further. No longer attempting to control Dronid by proxy, the Houses' representatives come out into the open to personally oversee the attack.

The War has begun.

For millions of years, the ruling Houses have dealt with perceived threats to history by cleanly removing individuals, or even whole environments, by remote control from the comfort of the Homeworld. Now, however, they're up against an enemy which can counter such moves in kind: and the Houses realise that for the first time in living memory a battle will have to be fought physically. Dronid is only the first of a million sites which will have to be secured by House forces, city by city and world by world. The battle fought on Dronid is therefore the most visceral conflict known since the war with the Yssgaroth. Not surprisingly, it later acquires a mythical status, the Great Houses being both repelled and fascinated by this newly-discovered iconography of warfare. Folklore has it that the very last surviving member of the Grandfather's old House dies on Dronid during this first battle, his body buried beneath the ruins of the capital, the first true casualty of the War. What's certain is that the world is devastated, its surface pock-marked with areas of unstable time (a side-effect of the weaponry being employed by both sides). The locals will soon discover that even the atmosphere on Dronid can make you old.

Ultimately, the battle is a stalemate. Both sides take heavy casualties, and once Dronid's two major powerbases are crippled the world immediately loses its tactical importance. But the enemy's forces are

making similar takeover bids on a thousand other worlds, its armies finally emerging from the unseen regions of the Spiral Politic and challenging the Homeworld's dominion over causality. More importance than ever is put on the timeship breeding programme, as the ruling Houses dispatch their (still-limited) forces across the face of history.

Then the Homeworld itself is attacked. The enemy has no illusions that it'll be able to destroy the Great Houses completely, but a large chunk of the War King's arsenal is eradicated in the assault. For many on the Homeworld, the War has until now been a purely abstract idea, a crisis which only affects the outside universe. For them, this is where the conflict really begins.

Back on Dronid, a few members of the once-powerful criminal syndicates survive and begin to rebuild the civilisation. Many Faction Paradox agents come through the conflict alive: though their (House-controlled) leader is no longer present, he has at least enabled them to see out the start of the War, and as a result the Faction's forces are more numerous than those of any other gang.

Fifty years ago

The War quickly expands across the Spiral Politic, and two rival forms of history clash across the battle-lines of cause and effect. The early engagements are messy and badly-prepared, marked by rushed attacks on both sides. This is the era of the Thousand-Year Battles, although the Thousand Years in question are purely subjective. Many worlds in the middle of the war-zone (which is to say, in the contested areas of causality) become irreparably scarred.

Outside the theatre of War, the Celestis once again attempt to interfere in affairs even though they see the conflict as little more than a diversion. The Celestis are divided as to whether they should support the Houses or the enemy: now they have no real stake in the conflict, it seems to be a question of which side provides the most distraction. In the years to come conceptual weaponry (based on the Celestis' own memetic technology) will be leaked to the enemy by certain elements among the Celestis, while others will supply intelligence to the Homeworld, though the majority of the Houses regard them as both traitors and aberrations.

Though the details remain unclear, the 103-Form breeding programme begins on the Homeworld. This is presumably done with the assistance of

Compassion, but as Compassion isn't known to have a great interest in either side of the War it's not known what she's given in return for her facilities. The first 103-Form timeships will soon come into service, timeships which can think, act and potentially even reproduce as if they were part of the organic universe.

Forty-nine years ago

Feeling that the Great Houses will now be too busy to notice its operations, Faction Paradox steps up its programme of cultural infiltration from its seat in the Eleven-Day Empire, once again establishing links with various hominid cultures around history. Among those worlds affected is Ordifica, a twenty-sixth century human colony, where the local media has come more or less under the control of the Faction's representative Mother Mathara (one of the Faction's less pleasant agents, by anyone's standards). The War disrupts many Faction lines of communication, however. By this point the Faction's Mission on Dronid has rebuilt itself in the wreckage, but it receives barely any help from the Eleven-Day Empire.

Though Ordifica is the cornerstone of the project, the earliest of the Faction's human shock troops - later known as the Remote - are tested against a House stronghold on Simia-KK98, a world whose history was hotly disputed by the two major sides in the early stages of the War. The attack is a miserable failure, and although in theory the Remote are supposed to be unknown, unpredictable assassins, the Houses soon deduce that Faction Paradox is behind the assault.

In the wake of Simia-KK98 the Faction elects to give future Remote troops a greater degree of autonomy. The Faction's elders are happy to admit that as the bastard offspring of the Homeworld, they're not exactly well-equipped to train the human psyche. Various experimental Remote projects are begun in order to test the limits of the troops, the earliest (in local time, at least) being initiated in North America during the nineteenth century.

Forty-five years ago

The Second Wave of the House Military is unleashed on the Spiral Politic, the first generation of soldiers born from the military breeding-engines of the War King and specifically raised for warfare. The breeding of armies is a complex matter, however, and the approach of the Second Wave is somewhat more fanatical than the ruling Houses might like. The

new troop class insists that all offences against the protocols of the Homeworld need to be met with extreme force, and as the true enemy's forces are often too well-entrenched to be worth attacking, the Second Wave spends much of its time seeking out the powerbases of errant groups like Faction Paradox.

The formative Remote colonies suffer more than most. Ordifica is entirely eradicated. Faction Paradox removes its agents there shortly before the calamity, and begins to set up independent communities for them around the Spiral Politic. From now on, the Remote will be on permanent stand-by throughout the War. Should the two sides sufficiently weaken each other, they'll be called into action and pick the wreckage clean.

At least in theory. The question is, with the House Military breathing down its neck will Faction Paradox be able to survive long enough to see its plans come to fruition?

Forty-three years ago

Possibly the lowest point in the Faction's history so far, as its lines of communication are shattered and its resources in the outside universe are destroyed by the genocidal crusades of the Second Wave. There's unprecedented dissent in the Faction's ranks - and this from an organisation for which dissent is supposedly a way of life - which leads to a series of defections, not to mention the founding of a short-lived breakaway sect. Six years later, Faction Paradox suffers yet another indignity when the Eleven-Day Empire is breached by a hostile force originating among the lesser species.

Although this assault causes a fair degree of destruction within the Empire, at least the re-building period gives the Faction's upper ranks a chance to take stock and re-consider their strategy. (A detailed history of much of this period can be found in The Book of the War.)

Thirty-six years ago

By this point the War is entering its entrenchment phase, far from the badly-thought-out strikes and counter-strikes of the Thousand-Year Battles. On the Homeworld, military breeding has been somewhat refined, and House society's increasing interest in the purely biological has led to the newly-created Fourth Wave adopting a policy of "bio-diversity": it's suggested that some of the Fourth Wave cohorts are designed to be able to

reproduce without the need for breeding-engines, or possibly even cross-breed with agents of the lesser species.

All of this is approved by the War King, but for the more traditional ruling Houses there's a sense that it's possible to take the concept of alliance a little too far.

Twenty-two years ago

A cautious Faction Paradox is still monitoring the few surviving Remote communities, and in some cases even begins to step up the training of its shock troops, though in light of previous failures the Mothers and Fathers who oversee such projects are careful not to push things too far. The Eleven-Day Empire eventually concludes that as it'll be generations before the Remote are suitable for their intended purpose, it might be wise to cut all ties to them for the time being.

However, it's noticeable that the Remote are now beginning to spread of their own accord. Apart from the frequent Remote migrations through the later human colonies, on Earth the (cultural) descendants of the nineteenth century Remote have formed a society of their own in North America. The North Los Angeles Cabal has a significant impact on human culture throughout the 1900s, although its operations are eventually shut down by the Great Houses.

c. Ten years ago

By now, all contact between the Faction and the Remote has effectively been severed. The Faction has become a far more subtle and studious organisation by this point, committed to careful bio-research rather than the grand and sweeping gestures of its past.

It's a symptom of the War in general. The entrenchment phase is well and truly under way, and throughout its history Faction Paradox has always tended to mirror the ruling Houses.

Five years ago

Little Sister Justine is a new initiate into Faction Paradox, and in order to broaden her horizons (her upbringing was on nineteenth century Earth, her recruitment a side-effect of one of the Remote experiments) she's sent to serve her apprenticeship at the Faction Mission on Dronid. Almost fifty years after the start of the War, the Mission continues to vie for power on a world now forgotten by the chief Warring sides. In charge of the Mission at

this time is Cousin Sanjira, and Little Sister Justine becomes one of the younger family members under his guidance.

At this point the Eleven-Day Empire controls six large-scale warships of its own, not counting those vessels stolen by the Remote. It's not a huge number, but then, military conquest isn't really on the agenda. Nonetheless, each of the massive, skeletal vessels is capable of destroying complete ecosystems without much difficulty, and the warships begin a campaign of eradicating all those worlds where Faction Paradox has been careless in the past in order to throw the ruling Houses off the organisation's scent. (The worlds erased in this fashion tend to be colony planets where the Faction did once have a presence, but where civilisation has now fallen. Thus, casualties are numbered in thousands rather than billions… at least at this point.)

Four years ago

A relic is uncovered on Dronid, the corpse of a member of one of the Houses, supposedly a great hero who gave his life in the first battle of the War. Giving the dead their due, Cousin Sanjira performs the rite to dispatch the body into the nexus of causality, not realising that the dead individual was in fact the last member of the Grandfather's birth-House: not just a bloodline-relative of the founder, but an individual whose biodata holds certain key secrets which could prove invaluable to those parties involved in the War. (Of course, this makes very little sense. The relic is obviously of value, and yet nobody seems to have ever searched Dronid for it before… or if they did, they found nothing and concluded that the body had been lost. This leads to the suggestion that somebody may have planted the relic in the ruins of Dronid, some time after the battle there, but all this is speculation.)

The relic is lost to time, and on discovering its importance Cousin Sanjira's guilt compels him to offer himself up to Paradox as a punishment. Following his departure, Justine shows potential and is brought to the Eleven-Day Empire to conclude her apprenticeship in the presence of the Mothers and Fathers. She's seventeen years old, but appears older thanks to conditions on Dronid.

Three years ago

As she reaches her eighteenth birthday, Little Sister Justine is made a Cousin, and as a prelude to the initiation is sent on her first mission outside

the Eleven-Day Empire. She's dispatched to late twenty-first century Earth, where she's charged with the task of retrieving the relic lost by Sanjira (which has arrived on Earth as a result of the funeral rites).

During the mission, Justine encounters an agent from the Great Houses who originates from a time in her relative future, several hundred years into the War. The Faction is pleased to discover that the power of the Great Houses has been all but destroyed by this point, and that the original Homeworld has been lost. Furthermore, the agent's knowledge of Faction Paradox demonstrates that the organisation must survive for at least a few centuries more. Justine ultimately fails in her mission, but this failure has been anticipated by the Faction's elders: the initiation is, by anyone's standards, a difficult one. Judging Justine to have done well in the field, her elders allow her to undergo the ritual in which her personal weapon is bound to her. Justine's closest confidant in the Eleven-Day Empire is Cousin Eliza, whose origins remain foggy but who was definitely born on Earth. Justine and Eliza undergo the bonding ritual on the same day, both of them nominating the sword as their weapon of choice.

Meanwhile, the relic from Dronid is believed destroyed, its secrets lost forever.

One year ago

Mother Mathara captains one of the six Faction warships to a degenerate colony world called Dust, on a mission to introduce one of Godfather Morlock's biodata viruses to a formative new ecosystem there. The project backfires, but Mathara discovers certain interesting things in the process.

Though it fails to infect the ecosystem, the biodata virus does find a target on Dust, sinking its claws into an agent of the Homeworld who happens to be present there. However, Mathara soon realises that the timelines have once again become tangled. The agent in question hails from the past, from an era several centuries prior to the beginning of the War, an era before the Grandfather's rebellion and imprisonment. In other words, despite all the built-in protocols of time-travel some of the Faction's biodata has become embedded in the past of the Great Houses.

Mathara concludes that in time, the biodata will take root in its victim: as a result, all of history could be re-modelled. She reports this to the Eleven-Day Empire, which decides to keep a close eye on the past. The

Faction’s agents now have a kind of Trojan Horse in the history of the Homeworld… they just have to work out how best to use it.

Now

Following the era described in The Book of the War, the events of The Faction Paradox Protocols begin. Cousin Justine is twenty-one years old and serving in the Eleven-Day Empire under (among others) Godfather Morlock.

Tomorrow's News

The Future

Agents of the Faction, like the agents of the Great Houses, have occasionally crossed paths with elements from the future of the Homeworld and the Eleven-Day Empire. As it's theoretically impossible for the timeships of the Houses to take their pilots into their own futures - although Faction Paradox has no objection to trying - such encounters are considered to be important, possibly even providential, events. Certain things about the future are therefore known, although the details are horribly vague…

The New Generation

Vast changes take place on the Homeworld after the start of the War. Within decades the 103-Forms become commonplace, and research begins into the possibility of second-generation biological timeships (or third-generation, counting Compassion). And members of the Great Houses are also re-engineered in the face of the conflict. Any member of a House is capable of regenerating his/ her tissue when his/ her body becomes damaged, but new elements are introduced to the reproductive systems so that each regeneration increases the military potential of the body, a practice begun during the Second Wave and soon to become universal. As a result, more and more of the Houses' agents lose their hominid forms altogether and become living, breathing war machines. The first stage is the growth of biological armour, not entirely unlike that worn by the Faction: the final stage is a transformation into something barely recognisable as an organic form at all.

Inevitably, the War King introduces military garrisons on worlds throughout the Spiral Politic. Many of these outposts are disguised, so as not to alert the enemy. In some cases the Houses' soldiers replace

individuals already living on those worlds, taking on their forms and living out their lives until such a time as the troops are needed in combat. Cross-dimensional war can be subtle, and on occasion very, very confusing.

The Fall of the Homeworld

Ultimately, the enemy gains so much ground that the Homeworld itself is destroyed, though the exact circumstances remain unclear. By this stage the eight substitute Homeworlds are fully-populated by the ruling Houses' agents, and more cloneworlds are being constructed all the time, but as decoys they're evidently inadequate. The Great Houses begin to realise that they're standing on the brink of extinction, their colonies throughout the continuum struggling for survival, their garrisons gradually turning into survival shelters. It's been noted that despite the instructions of the Presidency which created them, in the future the surviving Homeworlds are in constant contact with each other, the various Houses and caretaker-Houses becoming a united front after the first Homeworld's fall.

However, the final outcome of the War remains unknown. Indeed, in a universe where four-dimension warfare is now considered to be normal, it's possible that there's no such thing as a final outcome.